



...provides **support** for youth in New Haven's lowest income neighborhoods to build the **skills and motivation** to be healthy and successful in life.

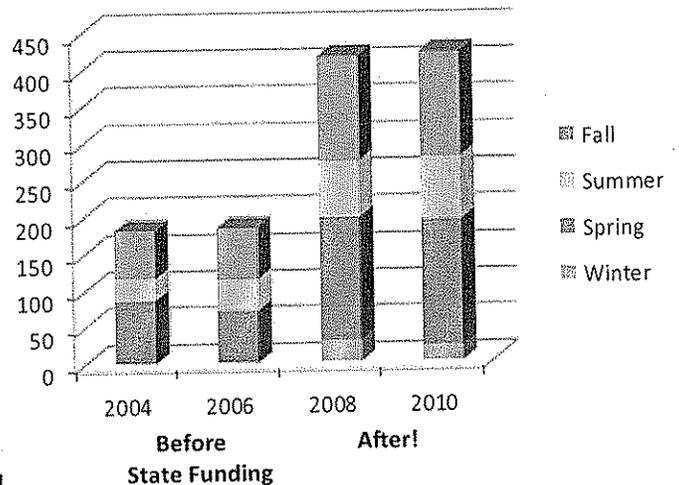
...creates **opportunities** for youth to be **agents of positive change** in their neighborhoods and environment!

# SUPPORT solar youth

Written Testimony for  
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing  
March 4, 2011

*Joanne Sculli, Executive Director/Founder*  
SOLAR YOUTH, INC. is a New Haven-based youth development and environmental education organization founded in the fall of 2000 by youth and adults. Our mission is to provide opportunities for young people to develop a **positive sense of self** and **connection and commitment** to others through programs that incorporate environmental exploration, leadership and community service. There is a tremendous need for programs for Connecticut's urban youth that provide developmental supports and opportunities.

Enrollment in Solar Youth Program by Year



**We ask you to renew your support for Solar Youth in the amount of \$75,000.** Funding received since 2006 through the Department of Social Services has helped **double the number of youth served in our after-school and summer programs in the last 4 years.** This spring we are expanding our Neighborhood Model programs into a second community. A funding cut at this time would severely impede this much needed program expansion. Solar Youth, Inc. makes a real impact on the lives of the youth, families and communities where we serve. Thank you for your time and support.



## Written Testimony from Youth and Parents

March 4, 2011

### Mahaghane Amanie Tappin (11)

My name is Mahaghane Amanie Tappin. I have been in Solar Youth for over 3 years now. I have friends who have family members who have been killed or are in jail. Some people walk around outside with their pants hanging down and it is not cool.

Solar Youth creates opportunities to learn more about nature and how to be responsible and respectful. Without Solar Youth it is boring after school and it is no fun to just be outside. That's when kids get into trouble. On days there is no Solar Youth, and I see the gate open, I come anyway and bother everyone, because I am bored, and I love it there.

Please Support Solar Youth so it can be open even more times than it is now!!

### Devante Pratt (16)

Hello. My name is Devante and I am an intern at Solar Youth. When I first entered Solar Youth as an intern it was my first job. I came in a little inexperienced, but with the support of everybody up here and the help of my co-workers I am more than ready to educate the youth of today and tomorrow. And I have a poem that I wrote a couple of seasons back with a program called Spoken Word at Solar Youth. The poem is "I am SY" [see right].

### Unsolicited Letter from a Parent...

Evan Hincapie  
25 Lodge ST APT 25  
New Haven CT

To: Solar Youth Program.

Solar Youth were the most positive experience in the childhood of my children. I don't know how to thank you for everything that the program has done for my children. Now my son Sebastian is more courageous to survive in any weather. My daughter Jennifer was afraid of the woods because in her mind she always thought that all forests were full of predators animals. Thank to this program she lost that fear. My wife and I also my children teachers think that they grew up and matured a lot.

Thank you very much.

## I AM SOLAR YOUTH

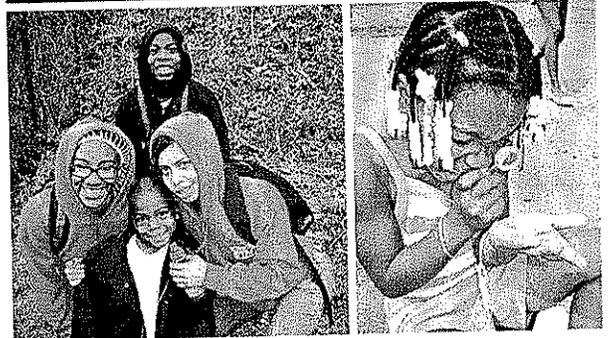
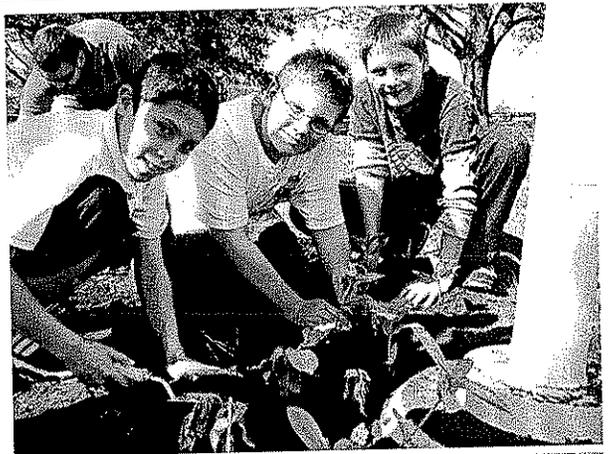
I am Solar Youth  
I am a place for youth  
I am a place of fun  
I am a place of peace  
I am a place to be free  
I am a place to be me  
I am Solar Youth

By Devante Pratt,  
intern for Solar Youth's Spoken Word

# Solar Youth Programs

## Neighborhood Model

Solar Youth's Neighborhood Model of concentrated programming allows us to have on-going, consistent contact with youth, starting at an early age all the way through young adulthood. The Neighborhood Model consists of a series of programs for youth—from an introductory program for 4 to 8 year olds co-led by neighborhood teenagers, to programs for 9 to 13 year olds that involve outdoor exploration and community service, to a "Green Jobs" skills program for teenagers. The Neighborhood Model allows youth to grow into new roles, and take on leadership as their skills and competencies develop. We have been piloting our Neighborhood Model for the past three years in Westville Manor, a public housing development in New Haven, and are planning to replicate our Model in two additional neighborhoods in the coming year.



## Teen Internships

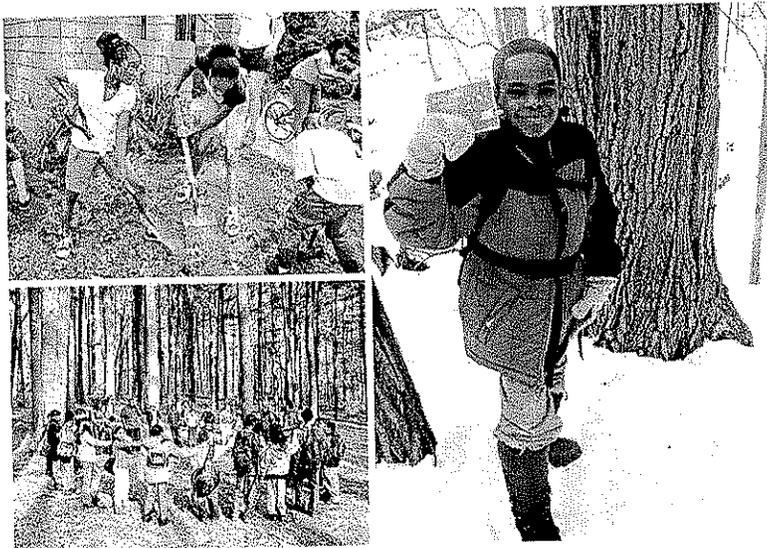
All Solar Youth out-of-school programs are facilitated by high school interns and adult staff, in a youth-adult partnership that challenges the interns to develop new skills and be positive role models for younger youth. Solar Youth offers many opportunities for teens to promote positive and enriching programs for youth as well as their greater community. Through programs like **Steward Teams**, **Citycology** and **Green Jobs Youth Development**, teens serve as teachers for younger children as they lead hands-on environmental education programs, or to act as environmental stewards by helping to make their city an ecologically healthier and more beautiful place.

## School-based Programs

Solar Youth also offers after- and in-school programs throughout New Haven. **HOLA (Hands-on Outdoor Learning Adventure)** is an in-school program in collaboration with Barnard Environmental Studies School that supplements teachers' in-class curriculum with hands-on, outdoor lessons. **Steward Teams** is an after-school program co-led by teenage interns that involves after-school outdoor explorations, full-day weekend adventures and community service.

## Citywide Programs

The **Solar Youth Summer Camp** is an intensive summer program that brings together youth from around the city to learn about the city's ecology as a whole, and develop community service and public education projects that cross neighborhood boundaries. We also offer a three-day **Youth Summit** during spring vacation that brings together members of each Steward Team to build on their knowledge, work together on a community service project, teach their community, and share what they have learned and accomplished.



# Solar Youth's Impact

## Youth Development Outcomes

In the fall of 2010, youth and family feedback forms revealed the following:

- 74% of youth indicated that Solar Youth helps them **enjoy going to school** more
- 70% of youth indicated that Solar Youth has improved their ability to **get along with people** at school
- 76% of youth indicated that SY helped them to **do better in school** overall
- 83% of youth agreed that after being in Solar Youth "I can **communicate better** with others"

Parent feedback:

- 88% said being in Solar Youth "improved my **child's behavior** at home"
- 85% said it "improved my child's overall **performance in school**"

Parents completed a series of statements that began with "Because of Solar Youth..."

- 100% indicated that "my child is **motivated to do well in school** and is actively engaged in learning"
- 96% indicated that "my child's **self-esteem** improved"
- 92% indicated that "my child's **communication skills** improved"
- 85% indicated that "my child's **ability to work with others** has improved"
- 100% indicated that "I would recommend Solar Youth to other parents"

## Community Impact

In 2010, youth developed and led over 50 **Community Service Action Projects**, including...

- the landscaping of 10 front yards and community spaces with resident input in our Green Jobs Youth Development Program
- The planting of a Peace Garden in a public housing development, encouraging non-violence
- Over 15 Clean-ups in local parks and neighborhoods and along rivers
- Presentation of youth-gathered data on traffic safety at a dangerous intersection to the city's Director of Traffic and Parking
- Painting over negative graffiti in a neighborhood
- And many more!

Youth also taught what they learned and accomplished to others through **Public Education Projects**, including

- 5 Youth-led forums for friends and families
- School-wide education campaign about the issue of homelessness
- Filming of 2 Public Service Announcements on littering
- And many more!

[www.solaryouth.org](http://www.solaryouth.org)

